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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

27 October 1976

MEMORANDUM FOR: The Director of Central Intelligence

FROM : Theodore G. Shackley
Acting Deputy Director for Operations

SUBJECT : MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Defensive Operations of Ground Forces in a Strategic Operation in a Theater of Military Operations

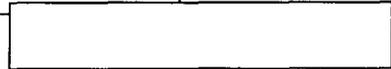
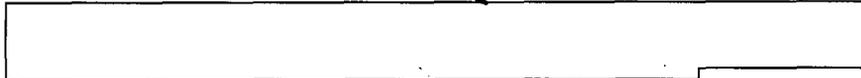
1. The enclosed Intelligence Information Special Report is part of a series now in preparation based on the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". This article examines the various forms of and conditions for the conduct of defensive operations of the ground forces in a strategic operation. Three major categories for the conduct of defensive operations are cited: those conducted at the beginning of a strategic operation, a forced going over to the defense, and a deliberate going over to the defense. In addition, the article discusses some of the distinctive features of the different types of defense, preparation, the methods for conducting them, and conditions determining them. Finally, the disruption of an enemy offensive with defending troops in both non-nuclear and nuclear periods is studied. This article appeared in Issue No. 2 (84) for 1968.

2. Because the source of this report is extremely sensitive, this document should be handled on a strict need-to-know basis within recipient agencies. For ease of reference, reports from this publication have been assigned

Theodore G. Shackley

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Intelligence Information Special Report

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COUNTRY USSR

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SUBJECT

MILITARY THOUGHT (USSR): Defensive Operations of Ground Forces
in a Strategic Operation in a
Theater of Military Operations

SOURCE Documentary

Summary:

The following report is a translation from Russian of an article which appeared in Issue No. 2 (84) for 1968 of the SECRET USSR Ministry of Defense publication Collection of Articles of the Journal "Military Thought". The author of this article is Colonel I. Rachok. This article examines the various forms of and conditions for the conduct of defensive operations of the ground forces in a strategic operation in a theater of military operations. Three major categories for the conduct of defensive operations are cited: those conducted at the beginning of a strategic operation, a forced going over to the defense, and deliberate going over to the defense. In addition, the article discusses some of the distinctive features of the different types of defense, preparation, the methods for conducting them, and conditions determining them. Finally, the disruption of an enemy offensive with defending troops in both non-nuclear and nuclear periods is studied.

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Defensive Operations of Ground Forces in a
Strategic Operation in a Theater of Military Operations

by
Colonel I. Rachok

Considering the possible nature of modern warfare and the experience of the past war, our military cadres are making a comprehensive study not only of methods for conducting decisive offensive operations, but also of defensive operations on various scales which can be conducted on individual axes of any of the theaters of military operations using either nuclear weapons or only conventional means of destruction.

Assuredly, our armed forces must be ready to disrupt the aggressive intentions of probable enemies primarily by delivering sudden crippling strikes against them with all available combat means and by conducting decisive offensive operations on land, on sea and in air and space. But, nevertheless, the disruption of any aggression requires that defense be allotted an appropriate place, even if in practice we would have to resort to it only occasionally.

Army or front defensive operations may be conducted at the beginning of or during a strategic operation in a theater of military operations. We will dwell first of all on the conditions for conducting defensive operations at the very beginning of a strategic operation.

In developing their aggressive intentions, imperialists, as we know, count mainly upon surprise of attack. Therefore, along with the delivery of powerful strikes against the enemy, repelling of his air attacks and the development of decisive offensive operations, the theory of our operational art also envisages repelling a sudden incursion by enemy ground forces groupings. It is proposed that this be accomplished by a part of the ground forces which has been allocated from the first echelon of operational formations to cover the movement forward, deployment and going over to the offensive of attack groupings following the initial nuclear strike or only with supporting aviation and artillery fire, if combat actions in the theater of military operations are begun employing conventional means of

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destruction.

Defensive operations of troops which are allocated for cover during the repelling of a sudden enemy incursion can assume the most varied proportions. On certain axes, covering forces alone may prove to be insufficient for accomplishing a given task. Changing the balance of forces on all axes of the enemy offensive by employing nuclear weapons or other means of destruction within short periods of time may also be unsuccessful. For this reason, it is not out of the question in a number of instances to allocate a part or all of the forces of the first echelon, and possibly the second echelon of one or several armies to carry out tasks of repelling an enemy incursion and of defending the national border. It follows from this that along with the planning of offensive operations and the allocation of a part of the forces to cover the movement forward and deployment of troops, the practical necessity for advance planning (as an alternate variant) of defensive operations for armies of the first echelon of fronts, and possibly for the front as a whole, also arises. The recognition of such a necessity would be quite in line with the officially accepted theoretical position according to which it is considered possible for a part of the forces to go over to the defense at the beginning of a war when an unfavorable situation is developing for an offensive on one axis or another.

For example, such an unfavorable situation may develop for our ground forces on individual axes in the event the enemy delivers a massed preemptive nuclear strike as a result of which troops of one front or another may suffer considerable losses, particularly in respect to nuclear warheads and the means for their delivery. In addition, the enemy, having exploited the element of surprise, can undertake an incursion with all the combat-ready groupings of his ground forces during a nuclear strike. In such an unfavorable situation, individual operational formations (army or front) will be forced at the very beginning of combat actions to conduct defensive operations in order to disrupt an incursion by superior enemy forces, thereby creating conditions for subsequently going over to the offensive.

As a result of simultaneous delivery of the initial nuclear strikes by the sides, another situation may arise, as a result of which both sides will be forced temporarily to go over to the



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defense on individual axes. The fact is that, under these conditions, the adversaries will be occupied with eliminating the aftereffects of the employment of weapons of mass destruction in order to restore the combat effectiveness of their troops if their condition does not allow them immediately or as soon as possible to form attack groupings, having even limited strength, for going over to a decisive offensive. Such a situation is quite probable on an army and even on a front scale and may arise on a number of the most important axes of the theater of military operations. Before managing to prepare for going over to the offensive and before ascertaining the capabilities for conducting it on one axis or another, the surviving forces may be required to organize a defense in order to accomplish the tasks of repelling a possible enemy incursion if he is able to bring his forces and means to readiness earlier for the conduct of offensive actions.

Evidently, it is from precisely such positions that we must approach the problem of determining the possibility of forced employment of defense on an army and front scale at the very beginning of a strategic operation when the enemy is initiating military operations employing nuclear weapons.

When a war is unleashed with only conventional means of destruction, on individual axes of an offensive of large enemy groupings it may prove necessary to conduct army defensive operations simultaneously with the offensive of the main forces of one's own fronts on other axes. If, however, the enemy succeeds in creating a considerable superiority of forces and means (particularly in aviation and tanks as well as in artillery) for an incursion into the zone of one of the fronts, then that front will be forced, with a significant part of the first-echelon forces or with all of its forces, to first conduct a defensive operation, and then, having repelled the enemy incursion, to go over to the offensive to defeat his opposing groupings in cooperation with adjacent advancing fronts and formations (large units) of other branches of the armed forces.

The necessity of a forced going over by an army or front to the defense during an offensive operation either with or without the employment of nuclear weapons, obviously may arise as the result of an unsuccessful outcome of meeting engagements or if it had failed to disrupt a counterattack being prepared by a large

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enemy grouping, as well as under conditions when troops had been subjected to intense enemy nuclear weapons activity and had sustained great losses, ruling out the possibility of continuing the offensive. One of the reasons for troops of an operational formation going over to the defense during a period of nuclear actions may also be a temporary shortage of nuclear warheads for the destruction of a large enemy counterattack grouping, since the main efforts are concentrated on defeating it and developing an offensive on other axes.

Speaking of the conditions for conducting defensive operations during an offensive, yet another possible variant of the forced conduct of a defense on an operational scale must be considered. This may occur at the time of transition from non-nuclear actions to limited or mass employment of nuclear weapons. It is not out of the question that the enemy on that or some other axis may gain an advantage in time of delivery and in the yield of the initial nuclear strike delivered by operational-tactical means, and means that he will be able to regain the initiative as a result of an abrupt change in the situation and in the balance of forces in his favor.

Along with forced conditions, in a number of instances it may prove expedient to deliberately go over to the defense prior to the beginning of or during combat actions, in particular, on ocean or open seacoasts where it is possible for the enemy to conduct a landing and operations of large amphibious and airborne landing forces, as well as in difficult to negotiate mountainous, desert or marshy-woodland axes of theaters of military operations, or when, for military-political reasons, an offensive is not contemplated, but border military conflicts are possible. In other words, a deliberate transition to the defense on an operational scale will take place first of all on secondary axes and theaters of military operations.

However, we would also permit a deliberate going over to the defense in a border zone during a period of threat on certain major axes of the main theater, especially when the balance of forces which is forming up does not favor going over to a decisive offensive at the beginning of war. For example, in a similar situation the troops of the "western" front worked on going over to the defense during the DNEPR exercise.

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The distinctive features of deliberately undertaken defensive operations lie in the fact that their planning and preliminary preparation are accomplished ahead of time, in peacetime, and the necessary refinements are introduced in the period of threat or as combat actions begin. There will be completely different conditions for organization of the defense during a strategic operation in a theater of military operations, especially under the influence of enemy nuclear and chemical weapons, strikes by his aviation and groupings of ground forces and, on a coastal axis, by his naval forces.

If an army or front is forced to go over to the defense after a sudden enemy nuclear attack, then preparation of the defensive operation can go on simultaneously with the delivery of the retaliatory nuclear strike and repelling of the enemy incursion by forces of the covering troops, whereas the transition to the defense itself can go on simultaneously with the movement of troops from permanent deployment points and from concentration areas upon alert or from waiting areas. Such conditions for preparation of a defensive operation will very likely be the most complex. This complexity may be occasioned, first of all, by a completely new situation caused by the initiation of nuclear war, by the possibility of considerable troop losses resulting from the aggressor's nuclear attack, by insufficient readiness of part of the operational-tactical means for participation in the initial nuclear strike, as well as by a substantial change in the plan of actions of the front or army, since the conduct of an offensive operation on that axis may have been envisaged.

Under these conditions, one of the most important factors for achieving success in an operation is the gaining of time while taking basic preparatory measures. In a number of cases, for example, moving troops forward directly to a line on the state border to take up a defense may prove to be disadvantageous. It may be possible for first-echelon large units to go over to the defense upon a favorable line at some distance from the border. In this case, the actions of covering troops, the first to begin repelling a sudden incursion by enemy ground forces groupings, allow for a gaining of time to prepare a defensive operation.

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In order to achieve a more organized going over to the defense under these very difficult conditions, it obviously is desirable, along with the basic plan of actions of the front or army, the plan of the offensive operation -- to also have in advance a second (alternate) reconnoitered variant of the plan which stipulates that the troops will go over to the defense in a limited zone under the particularly unfavorable conditions of the beginning of combat actions on a given axis. The situation may force one to implement that second variant initially, and, while it is being carried out, move to accomplish the main plan.

Research shows that a gain in time when going over to the defense during an offensive may be achieved, first of all, by delivering strikes against advancing enemy groupings with nuclear and chemical weapons, and aviation, and secondly, by having the first-echelon large units go over to the defense early -- in anticipation of a counterattack by superior enemy groupings when there are not enough forces and means to disrupt it during the continuing offensive. This is possible in the event that enemy preparation for the conduct of a counterattack or for going over to a counteroffensive is discovered in a timely manner, that the composition of his groupings is determined, and also that an objective assessment of the developing balance of forces on the specified and adjacent axes...

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As is known, in a relatively favorable situation, away from any contact with the enemy, when the defense is set up it is intended that a forward security zone which is defended by the forward detachments (covering detachments) be established in the tactical zone.

The question arises as to whether we should also strive for this while the troops are going over to the defense during an offensive operation. In our opinion, the answer is yes. The fact is that the presence of a forward security zone will force the attacking enemy to prematurely expend a part of his forces and means, particularly his tactical nuclear weapons, and it will exhaust him and allow the gaining of a certain amount of time to establish a defensive grouping and prepare a defense on favorable lines in the depth. This is particularly important in those instances when the lines upon which the repelling of an enemy

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counterattack by forward units begins are unfavorable for the organization of a defense by the main forces of the army. We must suppose that sometimes it is to our advantage to have a forward security zone formed by forward units (detachments) not only in a division, but on an army scale as well. It seems to us that this question merits study during the operational and combat training of troops.

Large units of the second echelon usually are assigned primary and alternate areas of disposition, areas (lines) of defense in the operational depth, several axes for counterattacks upon each of which lines of deployment are designated, and movement routes and siting areas for missile battalions and artillery also are prepared. We can agree with such a proposition when it is viewed as a variant. In our view, in the majority of cases, it is more to the advantage of second-echelon large units to specify immediately the zones of defense on the most important axes of the enemy offensive. If these divisions are assigned disposition areas alone, then the troops may be insufficiently prepared for repelling the attack of enemy groupings which have broken through on the lines which they will have to occupy during the operation.

In view of the necessity of establishing a deeply echeloned defense capable of withstanding massed strikes by nuclear weapons and other enemy means of destruction, as well as an offensive by superior groupings of his ground forces, particularly armored troops, it is desirable to restore such an element of the structure of an operational defense as defensive lines in all situations in which defensive operations are being conducted. They can be called army and front defensive lines since they are set up in the operational depth by large units of the second echelon or reserve of an army or front.

Depending upon the importance of the defended axis, the objectives and concept of the defensive operation, the strength of one's own forces and means and of the attacking enemy, and also the terrain conditions, several of these lines may be designated and prepared. The distance between them and the manner in which they are drawn both differ greatly. In establishing one to two army lines and one to two front lines, their overall depth in the army's zone of defense may reach 100 to 150 kilometers, whereas in the front's zone their depth may

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reach 300 kilometers or more.

A few words on the employment of nuclear weapons. In spite of the fact that a front or an army in a defense will, as a rule, have a small number of nuclear warheads at its disposal, nuclear strikes may be the decisive means for defeating attacking enemy groupings.

In a defensive operation, nuclear strikes are prepared and carried out primarily in order to destroy the enemy nuclear means and most dangerous attacking groupings, particularly armor, to inflict maximum damage on him and also to defeat the enemy on axes where counterattacks are being conducted or where the defending forces are going over to the offensive.

During a defensive operation it is most likely that there will be an opportunity to deliver single or grouped nuclear strikes rather than massed ones. In such a case, if a massed nuclear strike is delivered with the means of the senior commander against the attacking enemy grouping, it must be quickly exploited by the defending troops in order to go over to the offensive, if only on individual axes. As for tactical nuclear warheads, in a defense it may often be expedient to use them in a centralized manner on an army scale.

In a defense, observation of the principle of efficient use of nuclear means, i.e., employing them at the most decisive moments of the operation, acquires particular importance. If, for example, single nuclear strikes against an advancing, deploying or attacking enemy prove to be advantageous -- from the point of view of weakening his main groupings, of delaying their offensive and of gaining time for strengthening the defense on the threatened axes -- then, of course, they must be delivered. But if the effectiveness of such single strikes will not be sufficient, then it is better to save the available nuclear warheads until a specified time and use them together with those newly brought up to inflict more substantial destruction upon an attacking enemy by conducting a grouped or massed nuclear strike at decisive moments in the defensive operation, for example, when delivering a counterattack.

Nuclear minefields may prove to be a highly effective means for destroying the enemy during defensive operations. It is

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possible to lay them in the form of single nuclear mines (land mines), clusters or sectors (lines) on the probable axes of deployment and attack of the main enemy groupings in the forward security zone, in front of the forward edge, on the flanks and in the depth of one's own defense, taking into consideration, of course, their radius of destruction caused by all the elements of the burst with a view to the safety of one's own troops.

The methods of conducting defensive operations and defeating attacking enemy groupings will be determined in each specific instance by the objectives of the operation, by the conditions for going over to the defense (perforce or deliberately, while under enemy strikes or beforehand, with or without employing nuclear weapons), by the degree of destruction of the enemy with strategic or front means, by the strength and the combat capabilities of the front or army, and by the nature of their cooperation with attacking operational formations. They will also depend on the strength of the groupings, the capabilities and the nature of the actions of the attacking enemy.

We must consider the principal method for conducting a defensive operation of a front or army during nuclear actions to be the destruction of attacking enemy groupings with nuclear and chemical weapons and with fire from conventional means in conjunction with the firm holding of areas which are most important in an operational sense and with the conduct of decisive counterattacks following nuclear strikes.

Accordingly, the defeat of enemy groupings may be achieved by delivering strikes with means of mass destruction in conjunction with those made by conventional means when these groupings are moving forward, when they are being deployed on the line of commitment to battle or when they are in the departure area for the offensive. For this purpose, a strike by the combined-arms large units forward of the front of defense may be delivered under favorable circumstances following the nuclear, chemical and fire strikes, or else a counterattack by the second echelons of the army or front may be launched against the penetrating enemy groupings.

The application of one or another method, or a combination thereof, to defeat an attacking enemy must lead in the end to a substantial amount of destruction being inflicted upon him, to a

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disruption of his offensive, and to the creation of conditions for the continuation of the offensive on other axes, and for the going over of defending troops to a decisive offensive or resumption of an offensive which they had interrupted. In the first place, success in employing one method or another presupposes constant combat against means of nuclear attack, the results of which will determine to a significant degree at what stage we may achieve a disruption of the enemy offensive.

The question of a defense's capabilities for disrupting an enemy offensive is not new. The objective of a defense, in general terms, almost always consists in using the least number of forces to inflict such destruction upon superior enemy forces as would result in his being unable to continue the offensive, that is, ultimately to force him to abandon the offensive.

The experience of past wars, particularly the Great Patriotic War, shows that such objectives in defense were successfully achieved. But in the defensive operations of the last war, it was possible to disrupt an enemy offensive by inflicting successive fire destruction upon him in all phases of the operation and by conducting decisive counterattacks and counterthrusts against enemy groupings which had penetrated or broken through. This has been the most characteristic method of conducting a defensive operation in the past.

How should we approach the problem of disrupting an enemy offensive with defending troops under present conditions? Is it possible to disrupt an offensive which is in preparation, and at what stage? The answers to these questions will differ for the various conditions of the conduct of a defense.

If the defensive operation is conducted in a period of non-nuclear actions, then, in comparison with the last war, the principal difference in the approach to the capabilities of the defending troops for disrupting an enemy offensive obviously will not exist. In order to disrupt an enemy offensive, the defending troops, employing conventional means of destruction, must, as previously, also inflict successive fire destruction on his groupings on the approaches to the defense and when they are deploying for an offensive (counterpreparation), while repelling attacks, and, in case of an enemy penetration into the depth of the defense, must prevent his further breakthrough and complete

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his destruction with counterattacks, counterthrusts and by going over to the offensive. Successive destruction inflicted upon enemy groupings during each period of his offensive can and must lead in the final analysis to its disruption and to the creation of conditions for defeating the enemy in subsequent aggressive offensive operations.

Such an approach to the problem of disrupting an offensive during a defensive operation in the non-nuclear period is based on the fact that when conducting combat actions employing conventional means of destruction alone, it is impossible to achieve a drastic change in the balance of forces in one's favor in a short period of time, meaning, therefore, that any talk of disrupting an enemy offensive as a result of delivering one powerful strike or by conducting some one-phase actions of defending troops is out of the question. What is more, one cannot count on the disruption of an enemy offensive in preparation.

It is possible to approach the problem of disrupting an enemy offensive in the period of nuclear actions quite differently. The massed employment of nuclear weapons by the means of a defending formation and a higher command level allows such destruction to be inflicted upon enemy groupings which are preparing for or conducting an offensive, as a result of which he will be forced to discontinue it. Thus, with one powerful nuclear weapons strike and through one-phase actions of troops following it, the achievement of an abrupt, favorable change in the balance of forces and, consequently, a disruption of the enemy offensive, are possible.

In so doing, conditions for the disruption of an enemy offensive may, in principle, be created during any period of the operation. But this will depend, first of all, on the capabilities of a defending front or army for inflicting decisive destruction upon main enemy groupings with nuclear weapons, on the capabilities for employing nuclear weapons with strategic means against these groupings, on the timely destruction of enemy means of nuclear attack, and also on the degree of support given to defending troops by adjacent attacking operational formations. Accordingly, the following are of no little importance: decisive maneuvering of missile/nuclear means for delivering strikes against an advancing enemy, the selection of the moment at which

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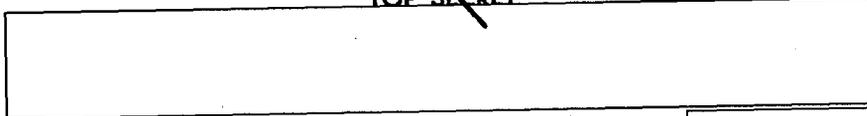
nuclear weapons can be most effectively employed against his main groupings, and the capabilities of troops for exploiting the results of nuclear strikes.

It is possible, however, to speak of disrupting an enemy offensive under preparation with defending forces, of course, only when the front or army goes over to the defense ahead of time and, consequently, there is timely preparation of strikes against attacking enemy groupings during the period of their movement forward and deployment for the offensive. If we succeed in detecting enemy preparations for the delivery of a counterattack in a timely manner, then it is possible to disrupt or severely weaken him while still in the preparation process by delivering powerful, sudden nuclear and chemical strikes against means of nuclear attack and advancing large reserve groupings.

Of course, in the event that the front and army have limited capabilities for inflicting destruction upon the enemy groupings moving forward and it is impossible to employ strategic nuclear weapons against him in this period, it is proper to raise the question only of weakening them and delaying their going over to the offensive. In these cases, it is necessary to exploit every opportunity to prepare strikes with nuclear and chemical weapons, with aviation, and conventional means against main enemy groupings during their deployment for going over to the offensive. Such an opportunity may be practicable if, by this moment, the troops going over to the defense have a certain number of tactical nuclear and chemical warheads at their disposal, and if the front succeeds in obtaining an additional allocation of a specific number of operational-tactical nuclear and chemical means.

However, it must be borne in mind that when front and army troops go over to the defense during an offensive, it is not always possible to assign the defending troops the objective of disrupting an enemy offensive in preparation. It is particularly impractical to set such a goal if the preparation of the enemy offensive (counterattack) proved to be tardily or insufficiently detected and the troops actually go over to the defense during the beginning stages of repelling this offensive (counterattack). Under these conditions and also in cases when the disruption of an enemy offensive (counterattack) under preparation by the methods examined above does not succeed owing to the limited

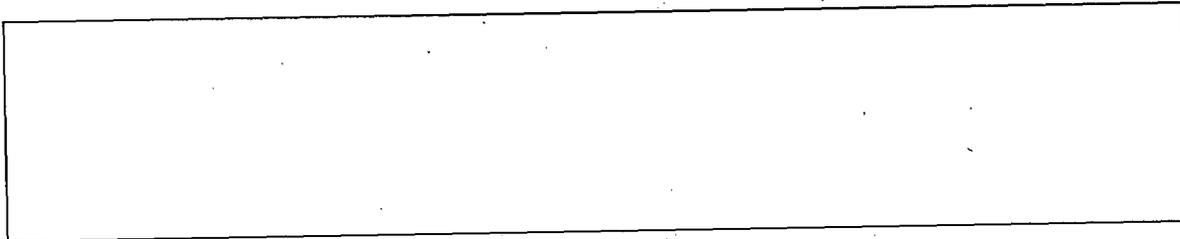
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quantity of allocated means, particularly nuclear, the objectives of a defensive operation will be achieved while repelling the enemy offensive by conducting counterattacks against penetrating groupings.

It is impossible in one article to discuss all the possible methods for defeating an attacking enemy in defensive operations conducted under various conditions. A more detailed examination of these methods, as well as questions relating to conditions and objectives of their conduct, and to the disposition of an operational defense and methods of preparing it, will, in great measure, promote thorough study and mastery of present-day defense on an operational scale.



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